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Facebook, REI and King County Council Chair Balducci announce major Eastrail investment

Bellevue, WA – Today REI Co-op, Facebook and King County Council Chair announced a suite of capital investments to complete the Northup Way Connector, a currently unfinished gap that will link Eastrail and the 520 Trail together and serve as a gateway into the City of Bellevue and its fast-growing Spring District neighborhood. This news follows REI and Facebook’s September announcement of investing \$1 million each in Eastrail infrastructure.

The 520 Trail currently passes over the Eastrail, with a 20-foot vertical grade difference between the trails. This project will knit these two regional trails together, creating a new connection for commuters travelling both the west and east side of Lake Washington, south from Renton and north to Woodinville, as well as much improved access for community members to enjoy this area of the Eastrail.

“Trails connect us to what we know and love here in King County, including open space and natural beauty, abundant access to safe and healthy recreation, economic opportunity and more. But we have more to do to expand our trails so even more people can benefit,” King County Council Chair Claudia Balducci said. “I’m so happy to be able to provide the remaining funding to complete this critical Eastrail connection faster than we imagined possible. This partnership among REI, Facebook, Eastrail Partners and King County illustrates how effective we can be when government and the private sector work in concert to deliver trails that bring us together.”

Built on a historic railroad line, Eastrail is quickly emerging as a central spine to the region’s extensive trail network and will span 42 miles on the east side of Lake Washington, from Renton to Snohomish County with a spur to Redmond. Eastrail offers significant benefits to these diverse communities. When completed it will make it easier for people to get to transit, boost economic growth, establish state-of-the-art fiber optic connectivity, and improve people’s access to outdoor health and wellness.

“The contributions from REI and Facebook will help us connect major east-west and north-south trails that knit together high-capacity transit, the University of Washington, and world-leading job centers,” said King County Executive Dow Constantine. “Eastrail is the model for a successful public-private partnership, one that promotes an equitable economic recovery and a resilient climate future.”

Last month as a part of a major Spring District real estate transaction, REI and Facebook announced the joint \$2 million capital fund investment to accelerate the development of Eastrail. In conjunction with this exciting announcement, King County Council Chair Claudia Balducci has included an amendment to the King County’s 2021-2022 budget, which is under consideration right now at the King County Council, to provide the remaining or “last in” funding needed in order to complete this estimated \$2.5 million project.

[Eastrail Partners](#), the nonprofit established to catalyze the Eastrail effort, unites the diverse communities, governments, the private sector, and nonprofits of Lake Washington’s Eastside to make the vision for the completed Eastrail a reality and improve equity through access. As the entity solely focused on this effort, they convene and catalyze advocacy and community engagement for the trail and establish community awareness to build diverse support.

“We appreciate the intentionality Facebook and REI brought to this decision process, and King County Council Chair Balducci’s championing of the Eastrail effort and in funding this project. REI and Facebook’s leadership provides an example for how the private sector can play an important role in helping bridge some of the funding gaps for this effort,” said Katherine Hollis, Executive Director of Eastrail Partners.

The Puget Sound region has already made great strides in realizing the vision for the Eastrail with over \$100 million invested in purchasing and improving the former rail corridor and 13 miles of trail currently open. However, an estimated \$233 million still needs to be raised for the trail to reach its potential as a multifaceted community asset.

“The Eastrail is one of the region’s most innovative trail projects and will provide non-motorized commuting connections and green space, while fostering healthy and active communities and bolstering economic development,” said Taldi Harrison, REI government and community affairs manager. “The Northup Way connector will serve a key role in connecting regional trail users with the Eastrail and local communities.” King County owns several sections of the trail, including the Wilburton Segment through Bellevue, that passes REI’s Bellevue store and by the Spring District, where Facebook purchased its new headquarters building.

“News that the significant contributions from Facebook and REI will be used to build a safe, convenient link between the Eastrail and Northup Way segment of the 520 Trail is just music to my ears,” said Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson. “I ride both regional trails often, so I know firsthand how this project will provide a vital new connection for people on their way to work or other activities. On behalf of the community, thank you!”

“Everyday Facebook employees in the Greater Seattle area work to build community bringing the world closer together. We are honored to partner on the North Bellevue Area Eastrail Project connecting diverse communities and businesses on the Eastside and beyond,” shared Vijaye Raji, Head of Office, Vice President of Entertainment for Facebook.

To learn more about Eastrail, please visit www.eastrailpartners.org.

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